DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 132 464 CG 007 920

AUTHOR Potter, Beverly A.
TITLE Increasing Decision-Making Behavior in Women: What the Counselor Can Do.
PUB DATE [72]
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Change; *Females; Information Needs; *Information Seeking; *Motivation; *Occupational Information; State of the Art Reviews; *Vocational Counseling; *Vocational Development

ABSTRACT

Girls and women "play at" making vocational decisions and setting life goals. They have little concrete information about the requirements of the work world and are unmotivated to seek out such information. Because adequate information is the basis of sound decision-making, it is important that counselors take active steps to motivate girls and women to gather information. Berlygn's theory of motivation to seek information can be used by counselors as a guideline for developing intervention strategies. The author concludes that steps be taken to increase girls and women's uncertainity about their futures which will lead to active information seeking behavior. After motivation has been developed, the counselor can teach the decision-making process. (Author)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED132464

Beverly A. Potter
Stanford University

Increasing Decision-making Behavior in Women: What the Counselor Can Do.

The development of a sense of positive self-worth in a person is a major goal of counseling. Although unconditional positive regard and empathy facilitate the growth of a positive self-image, they are insufficient as the sole therapeutic strategy. A sense of personal competency is equally as important as a feeling of acceptance in the development of high self-esteem. Thus, the counselor should make "skill-building" a major counseling goal. Decision-making and goal-setting are skills which people must learn in order to function effectively in this society. The person who makes and implements a decision - whether it be small or have far reaching implications - gains a feeling of competence, of independence, of control over his or her life. These feelings are major components of high self-esteem. In contrast, the person who avoids or is incapable of making a decision turns control of his or her life over to other people which results in feelings of loss of control, of being dependent and ineffectual - all indications of low self-esteem. The ability to make decisions and set goals is a skill in which many girls and women are deficient.

Boys and girls approach decision-making differently. Douvan and Adelson (1966) interviewed several hundred adolescent boys and girls regarding their plans and future expectations. The findings indicated that boys' occupational aspirations had a concrete and realistic quality. That is, boys actively approached the question of occupational choice. Their plans showed a high degree of specificity and coherence; they were sensitive to the occupational sphere and tested their own suitability for various jobs. In addition boys had considerable information about jobs and the educational or technical training required. When their information was insufficient they stated a desire

CG007920

for vocational counseling. The boys demonstrated good decision-making behaviors: their concern was with the content of the job such as the work style, the pay, and their personal interest in the work. These reality based criteria were used to make decisions.

The interviews tapped into the boys' fantasies about themselves by asking "Who would you like to be and why?" Boys' fantasies centered on qualities of the adult ideal related to work skills such as perserverence and resourcefulness. When asked what they would like to change about themselves, the boys again mentioned behaviors related to the work role, i.e., to be more responsible. In short, boys were concerned primarily with their occupational identities. They made concrete plans for their futures which were marked by a relatively realistic assessment of the job world and of their own capabilities. There was a continuity between the boys' expectations and their fantasies. Boys use their fantasies in a constructive manner to facilitate achieving their goals.

Girls were different from boys with respect to future planning. The girls had vague occupational plans and they were less definite than the boys about their aspirations. The girls' plans did not have the realistic quality evidenced in the boys' planning. They had not engaged in a decision-making process wherein they weighted their interests and abilities against various future roles and determined a goal uniquely suited to them. Rather, it seemed that girls stated goals because it was expected that they should have one.

Adequate information is the foundation of realistic decision-making. The Douvan and Adelson data reveal that girls were deficient in this area: they simply did not have information about the educational and occupational worlds. The range of occupations aspired to was restricted, clustering in a few highly visible and traditionally female occupations. 72% of the jobs mentioned were secretary, nurse,

and teacher. The lack of information is evident when we examine the criteria upon which girls' decisions were made. In the occupational sphere, we find girls knew very little about the actual content of various jobs. In contrast to the boys, the criteria for job selection focused on the job context, i.e., pleasant social setting in which one can make friends and meet men, and not on the job content. The same naivety in educational planning is evident. Even though the girls expressed the same educational aspirations as the boys, the girls could say very little about specific content or direction of the educational plan. Educational plans were frequently inconsistent with the stated occupational goals. More than a third of the girls who planned to go to college expressed vocational plans for which college would over-prepare them such as telephone operator, bookkeeper, or secretary.

Having the opportunity to observe live models is an important source of information. The interviews with boys revealed that the majority of boys could name at least one person with whom they had close contact who was employed in the occupational field of their choice. Very few girls had such models. They aspired to occupations traditionally labeled as feminine, yet most girls had little opportunity to associate closely with women holding such jobs.

Douvan and Adelson report that the girls were generally unmotivated: they were unmotivated to seek information, unmotivated to set goals, and unmotivated to actualize their plans. The girls expressed little desire to make a commitment to a job. Most of their choices were for jobs that require minimal skill which can be easily transferred to other jobs. When the girls' fantasy themes were examined the lack of motivation became apparent. Girls' fantasies did not center around themes that would supply energy for realistic efforts to achieve their

goals. Whereas the boys' fantasies were concerned with work-related themes, girls' fantasies were centered around appearance and popularity.

The general conclusion that emerges from this study is that girls "play at" making decisions for their futures. Generally the girls' stated goals and aspirations were to be actualized via a mate. In contrast to the general vagueness of the girls' personal goals, they were quite specific when it came to describing the occupational goals and behaviors of their future husbands. It became clear that the aspirations expressed by girls for themselves were, in fact, the occupations they hoped their future husbands would have.

Epstein (1970) reports that college women's plans for the future are highly contingent. Men, too, undoubtly make contingent plans. Planning for unexpected contingencies is usually indicative of good decision-making behavior. But in women we find the decision to work is usually contingent upon some negative outcome such as divorce or death. Any vocational or educational plans college women do make are subject to ready modification because of the plans of spouces or future spouces. Girls and women believe that most personal goals they set for themselves will probably be radically modified by external forces over which they seemingly have no control. Obviously, in such a situation we would not expect to find women highly motivated to make plans or highly committed to goals once set. In essence, the goals are contingent upon the worst possible future: they will be unchoosen old-maid - alone all their lives. Who would want to invest much energy in a future one hopes won't happen?

College women have no future image of themselves as working women, yet, they also reject the image of homemaker (Epstein 1970). Their rejection of both alternatives indicates that they have no

clear visualization of the future, and,consequently, do not prepare themselves for what is to come. As counselors, we must agree that this is a critical situation. The healthy person should have some direction and assume responsibility for planning his or her life. Yet, the woman hands control of her future life to other people.

As with adolescent girls, we find that among college women the motivation to go to college is not linked to the motivation to use college training. (Epstein 1970) It appears that getting a college education has become a middle-class imperative. It is an expected action but, for women, has very little to do with life goals. College become a period when life decisions are not demanded.

To summarize, boys begin in adolescence to shape their identities which are centered around who they are and what they do. This process has been labeled an identity crisis. They resolves this crisis by actively seeking information about the occupational world and developing the necessary skills. They make decisions and set personal goals based upon extensive information about themselves and the world. Girls, on the other hand, are not faced with an identity crisis. They are not concerned with the questions: "Who an I?" "What will I be and do?". As a consequence, they have little motivation to seek out concrete information about the occupational world and how they will fit into it.Girls and women play at making decisions and setting goals. They expect that they will not actualize these goals because they will be reppatedly modified by factors largely out of their control. Women's important decisions are made by others.

As counselors, we can ask ourselves the question: "Is avoidance of decision-making and goal-setting in women realistic?" No, it is not realistic; it is maladaptive. It is true that the majority of

women do marry and raise children; so do men. But men also plan for their future roles as workers and women do not. If we examine the statistics of the US Department of Labor (1969m 1970) we find that 90% of the women in this country will be in the labor force at some time in their lives. Right now 42% of all American women are working. What kind of work: dead-end, low-status jobs, not careers. 78% of all working women (as compared to 40% of working men) are employed as clerical workers, service workers, factory workers, and sales clerks. 15% of all women workers can be classified as professional or technical workers, three-quarters of which fall into the category of noncollege teacher and nurse. Fewer than 1% of all women workers fill positions traditionally considered "professional": lawyer, scientist, editor, physician, engineer, college professor, or senator.*

As counselors we are concerned about reality and helping our clientele to make decisions based upon reality. The fact is millions of women work but they do not plan for this work-role; they have no future image of themselves as workers. Thus reality demands that counselors alert girls and women to their real futures. If women planned realistically for their future work roles as boys and men do, women would not be forced into the dead-end and low-status jobs. If counselors would motivate women to set goals when they still have a chance to attain them, women, like men, would be in a better position to choose occupations. We counselors believe self-actualization is important for mental health. If women assumed more responsibility for their own futures, they would be more likely to actualize themselves as people, rather than to attempt to do so vicariously through their husbands and children.

---

* These points based upon US Department of Labor Statistics were made in Bem, S.L. & Bem, D.J., Training the Woman to know her place: the social antecendents of women in the world of work. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Psychology, Stanford University, 1971.

Many people, even some counselors, believe it is important or, at best, extremely difficult to combine marriage and a career. But does this myth reflect reality? The Department of Labor can shed light on this question. Looking only at those women who are married and living with their husbands, we find 58% of these women are in the labor force. One might say, "Yes, but these women don't have children." Not so. 45% of all mothers with children six to seventeen years of age and whose husbands are present work outside the home. One-third of all mothers within intact families who have three to five year olds are working; and one-fourth of all mothers within intact families with children under the age of three are working.* Why is it, then, that married women who are living with husbands and who have children can manage to work outside the home, yet, they can not - so the myth says- manage a marriage and a career?

Many people confuse the concept of career with professional types of occupations. If we examine the difference between a job and a career we find it has to do with decisions and plans. A career implies that a particular job is part of a plan of action for obtaining future positions. Within this frame of reference, the position of sales clerk could be considered the entry level position in a career in sales. For example, a woman could start as a sales clerk in a department store, make plans and take action to move into the position of head saleswoman, next into buyer, next into sales manager, and finally into manager. We would say this woman has a career. Another woman holding the same position of sales clerk who has not set goals would have a job, not a career. In short, a career implies commitment, decision-making and goal-setting. There is no reason why women who are married, the majority of whom will work anyway, can not engage in this type of career planning. Yet, they do not do this.

* Ibid.

It is the responsibility to counselors to initiate this type of decision-making and goal-setting behavior in girls and women.

It is important to stress that although there are very real factors which inhibit women from choosing careers, women often decide against careers without actually testing reality. Instead, they anticipate consequences and accept limitations or defeat which may not be inevitable. (Epstein 1970) No only do women not prepare themselves for the current reality that most of them will probably work for a large part of their lives, they are not preparing themselves to meet the new realities that will exist within their working lives. These are changing times and as more opportunities in education, industry, and business open for women will there be women prepared to take advantage of these opportunities?

It is the counselor's responsibility to intervene and help girls and women prepare for the current and future role they will be expected to assume. How can the counselor do this? First, the counselor must take a critical look at him- or herself.and become aware of how he or she inadvertently aids in the socialization of women. Thomas and Stewart (1971) demonstrated that secondary school counselors responded more positively to female clients with traditionally feminine goals than to female clients with nontraditional or deviant goals. Counselors should spend time exploring and challenging their values in this area.

The next obvious conclusion is counselors should teach girls and women to make decisions and set personal goals. This is no easy task because, as we have seen, girls and women are not motivated. Thus we would not expect them to invest much in learning these behaviors. This is where the counselor must begin: the concerned counselor must increase girls and women's motivation to make decisions and set goals.

Once this is accomplished, it is relatively easy to teach the process.

The foundation of a good decision is adequate information. Recall that girls have inadequate information about the world of work and little motivation to seek out such information. Berlygn's (1965) theory of motivation to seek information offers guidelines for intervention strategies designed to increase female motivation in this vital area.

The basic premise is that a state of uncertainity results in a motive to seek information and information is that which reduces uncertainity. Specifically, what is meant by uncertainity? First, uncertainity increases as the number of viable alternatives increases. That is, if a person has four alternatives from which to select, he or she is experiencing more uncertainity than if there were two alternatives. The second condition which increases uncertainity has to do with the probability of actualizing the alternatives. The more equaliprobable the alternatives, the more uncertainity. For example, there is high uncertainity in a situation wherein one knows that there is a 50-50 chance of acceptance to college. Both outcomes, acceptance or rejection, are equiprobably. In contrast, there is very little uncertainity in the situation wherein the person has a 90% chance of being accepted.

Let us look at girls and women in terms of the amount of uncertainity in their lives. We have already seen that there are relatively few occupational alternatives presented to women. Girls don't think of themselves as future workers; most girls do think of themselves as future wives. And statistically we know more than 90% of women marry. Thus even though alternatives do exist they are not preceived as probable. The uncertainity in women's lives lies not in "What will I do in my life?", not even in "Will I marry?", but in

"Whom will I marry?". Consequently, we can observe a great deal of information seeking around the questions of how to attract a mate. Women and girls are highly motivated when it comes to reducing this uncertainity.

A high level of uncertainity, in and of itself, does not lead to information seeking behavior. The level of motivation to reduce uncertainity is a function of two conditions. The first one is importance. This may be in terms of immediacy or centrailty to one's life. That is, a decision is more important if I must make it tomorrow than if I have a year to decide; and it is more important if I perceive it to have great impact upon my life than if I preceive it to be irrelevent. The second motivating condition is the subjective probability of success in obtaining the information. For example, there is a high degree of uncertainity as to what happens to one after death, yet we do not find most people investing much time and energy into discovering this information. Why? Because there is no way to find out; the information is not available.

Looking again at girls and women's motivation to seek information and make decisions within this frame of reference, we find that women do not see making occupational decisions and setting life goals as having central importance in their lives. They have been socialized to expect that their decisions and goals will be repeatedly altered by external circumstances. Consequently, importance is not a motivator. However, women do perceive the selection of a mate as relatively immediate and very central to their lives. Hense, they are highly motivated to seek information regarding how to find a mate. Obtaining information about women's possible work roles is not highly probable. Females are presented with stereotypic images of their role in the media and in books, (Pogreben, 1972, Weitzman, et. al., 1972, Jacklin, et. al., 1972) and there are few live models from which information

can be gathered. (Douvan & Adelson 1966, Epstein 1973) Consequently, the probability of success in obtaining information about alternatives for women is low which assists in inhibiting decision-making motivation. On the other hand, information about how to attract a mate is plentiful. One merely needs to turn on the TV or flip through a woman's magazine.

One way counselors can motivate girls and women to make decisions and set goals is by increasing their uncertainity about their futures: There has been no research into this area, thus it is up to each canselor to be innovative within her or his own setting. The counselor can begin by getting out of the office into the environment. Don't wait for girls and women to appear, few will do so because of the lack of motivation discussed herein.

The first intervention point is the number of viable alternatives and the probability of actualizing these alternatives: increase these. The politically active counselor can campaign to have more women hired for nontraditional roles within the school, i.e., shop teacher, principal, or maintance person. The counselor can work through educational associations to change the image of women in textbooks. Teachers can be encouraged to supplement the existing textbooks with information about women's contributions to science, literature and history. Most counselors can organize a career-day for girls bringing in real women in nontraditional jobs: telephone lineperson, bus driver, lawyer and so forth. Pictures of real working women can be placed around the school to stimulate girls to think about their futures.

Another intervention point is to increase the importance of making decisions and setting goals. Here too, the counselor must be innovative. The State of California (1972) has made available free of charge a game: When I Grow Up I'm Going to be Married. This game is specifically designed to increase high school girls' uncertainity about their futures. It can be used with other age groups,

Briefly, the game involves ten players who are each assigned a role. The roles are based upon statistics. For example, about 90% of women marry, thus nine of the ten roles will say: "You are married". It incorporates in this manner the statistics about education, divorce and so forth. There are numerous ways in which this game can be used innovatively. Boys should be included too. Boys have been subjected to the same stereotyped notions about the appropriate role for women. Most likely the majority of boys believe that their future wives will be full-time homemakers even though at least 58% of them will have working wives. If boys began to question girls about thier futures, this would be a powerful motivator.

The final intervention point is the perceived probability of obtaining information. It is important for the counselor to have current information available and easily accessible. Career Centers have proven to be a very effective ways to encourage students to begin planning their futures.

Once the counselor has stimulated several girls to question their futures it then becomes important to teach them the step-by-step process of making a decision. Gelatt, Varenhorst, and Carey (1972) have developed an excellent, comprehensive decision-making procedure which can be used in the classroom or in small groups.

The possible ways for increasing girls' uncertainity about their futures is limited only by the counselor's motivation and ingenuity. Every counselor can take some action, even if it is merely displaying pictures.

References

1. Bem, S., & Bem, D. Training the woman to know her place: the social antecedents of women in the world of work. Unpublished Manuscript, Dept. of Psychology, Stanford University, 1971.

2. Berlygn, D.E. Structure and Direction in Thinking. New York, Wiley, 1965

3. Douvan, E., & Adelson, J. The Adolescent Experience. Wiley, New York: 1966, Chapter 2.

4. Epstein, C. Woman's Place: Options and Limits in Professional Careers. University of California Press, Berkeley: 1971.

5. Gelatt, H., Varenhorst, B., & Carey, R. Deciding, College Entrance Examination Board, New York: 1972.

6. Jacklin, C., Hueners, M., Mischel, H., & Jacobs, C. As the Twig is bent-sex-role stereotyping in reading textbooks. Unpublished Manuscript, Dept. of Psychology, Stanford University, 1972.

7. Prgreben, L. Down with sexist upbrings. MS: The New Magazine for Women, Spring, 1972, pg. 18-32.

8. Thomas, A., & Stewart, N. Counselor response to female clients with deviate and conforming career goals. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1971, Vol. 18, No. 4, pg. 352-357.

9. U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Labor Statistics Administration, Women's Bureau. Fact Sheet on the Earning Gap. Feb. 1970

10. U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Labor Statistics Adminstration, Women's Bureau, Handbook on Women Workers, 1969, Bulletin 294.

11. Weitzman, L., Eifler, D., Hokada, E., & Ross, C. Sex role socialization in picture books for preschool children, The American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 77, # 6, 1972.

12. ---- When I Grow Up I'm Going to be Married: A Game Which Illustrates How Time and Circumstance Affect Women, State of California Advisory Commission on the Status of Women, Sacramento, Calif., 1972.